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## **Unclaimed Mineral Rights Mystery**

In a recent Arkansas Democrat-Gazette letter to the editor, a reader inquired about unclaimed mineral rights and what happens to the money that is collected on behalf of the lost owner. With the tremendous amount of natural gas activity in the state, many landowners have questions about royalties and what happens if a landowner moved, died or otherwise cannot be found.

The Arkansas Unclaimed Property Act requires holders of mineral royalties to establish an escrow account for owners who cannot be located after one year. Any royalties or other proceeds resulting from mineral extraction are to be deposited into the escrow account on the property owner's behalf. Holders of these escrow accounts, which would include natural gas companies, are required to file a report annually with the Arkansas Oil and Gas Commission. The report contains the name and address of the owner, the legal description of the property and the location of the escrow account.

If after 5 years no one has claimed the money in the escrow account, the money is presumed abandoned and submitted to the Auditor of State as unclaimed mineral proceeds. The Auditor of State makes the owner information publicly available through a search feature on our website and through advertisements in newspapers across the state. Anyone may search unclaimed property records online by visiting the Auditor of State's website at [www.auditor.ar.gov](http://www.auditor.ar.gov). There is no statute of limitations on claiming abandoned minerals, so it is important to check the website if you or your family own or may have owned property in areas with high natural gas extraction activity.

Once a year, the Auditor of State returns abandoned mineral proceeds to the county of origin. The amount that is returned to each county is determined by the Auditor of State, and is calculated so that enough funds will remain in the account to pay future claims. Unlike other forms of unclaimed property, the monies that are collected by the state are not used for state government operations nor calculated into the state budget forecast.

Remember, unclaimed property is not "lost." It belongs to you, the owner, and the state holds the property in trust for you to collect. If you have questions about unclaimed property law or want to search for any unclaimed property that the state might have in your name, visit the Auditor of State's website at [www.auditor.ar.gov](http://www.auditor.ar.gov) and click on "The Great Arkansas Treasure Hunt." You may also call the Auditor's office at 1-800-CLAIM IT.

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